DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 302 559 TM 012 546

AUTHOR Eissenberg, Thomas E.; Rudner, Lawrence M.
TITLE Explaining Test Results to Parents. ERIC Digest Number 102.
INSTITUTION American Institutes for Research, Washington, DC.; ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Sep 88
CONTRACT RI-88-062003
NOTE 3p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Grade Equivalent Scores; *Parent School Relationship; *Scores; *Standardized Tests; *Teacher Role; *Test Interpretation; *Test Results
IDENTIFIERS Fact Sheets; Percentile Ranks

ABSTRACT

Guidelines for explaining standardized test results to parents of students are provided. More specifically, the guidelines cover rationales for testing, the various types of scores and their meanings, and means of interpreting scores. Scores covered include stanine scores, percentile scores, and grade-level equivalent scores. The importance to parents of learning who else takes the same test(s) as do their children is also considered. Test results provide teachers and parents with a powerful way of checking whether their students and children, respectively, are working to their full potential. A short bibliography is included. (TJH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED302559

ERIC DIGEST

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
ERIC/TM
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation

Number 102, September 1988

American Institutes for Research, 3333 K Street, NW, Washington, DC 20007 (202)342-5060

Explaining Test Results to Parents

by Thomas E. Eissenberg and Lawrence M. Rudner

Students are taking more standardized tests than ever before. This means that their parents are seeing more test results. As a result, parents may call on you, as their children's teacher, to explain these test results.

Standardized test scores can give parents useful information about their children. Explaining the results to parents, however, can be difficult because parents may not understand what the test are for or what the scores mean. To help educate parents, you need to

- explain why students are tested,
- explain what the different types of scores are
- help parents to interpret test scores.

This digest will give you some basic information to help you answer parents' general questions about tests. It may also raise questions of your own. On the next page are some sources of more detailed information.

Why Are Students Tested?

Parents often ask, "Why were my children tested?" Help parents understand that standardized testing programs usually serve several purposes. They help teachers, principals, and superintendents

- evaluate and improve the school district
- evaluate and improve the individual school
- identify a child's academic strengths
- identify areas where a child may need to improve

You can also point out to parents that a testing program is only one of several tools you use to evaluate their children's performance. Children are never measured on the basis of one test alone.

What Are the Different Types of Scores?

You can help parents better understand test scores by helping them understand that they can compare their child's test scores to the scores of one or more groups of students. Three popular ways of making comparisons are by using stanines, percentiles, or grade-level equivalents.

Test publishers use one of these three methods to report test scores so that teachers and parents can compare an individual student's scores with the scores of other students who took the same test.

What are stanine scores?

Stanine is short for *standard nine*. The name comes from the fact that stanine scores range from a low of 1 to a high of 9. For instance, a stanine score of

- 1, 2, or 3 is below average
- 4, 5, or 6 is average
- 7, 8, or 9 is above average

If a child achieved a stanine score that was below average in a particular area, the test revealed an area in which the child needs improvement. If the child achieved an average stanine score, the test indicated that he or she performed at about the same level as other students who took the test. If the child achieved a stanine score that is above average, the test results mean that he or she performed better in that area than other students who took the test.

What are percentile scores?

In contrast to stanines, *percentiles* give parents a more detailed description of how their children compare with other students who took the test by showing scores that range from 1 to 99.

For example, if a student scored in the 66th percentile on a test, that student achieved a score that is higher than 66% of the other students who took the test. So, if 1,000 students took the test, the student in the 66th percentile scored higher than 660 students.

Do not confuse percentile scores with percentage correct scores. Percentile scores allow you to compare one student's scores with a group of students who took the test. Percentage correct scores simply reveal the number of items that a student answered correctly out of the total number of items.

What are grade-level equivalent scores?

Grade-level equivalent scores are determined by giving a test that is developed for a particular grade to

TM012546

students in other grades. For instance, test designers establish grade-equivalents for a 4th grade test by giving that same test to students who are in the 6th and the 2nd grades.

Grade-level equivalent scores are often misunderstood; be careful when you interpret them with parents. If a 4th grader received a 7th grade equivalent score on a 4th grade reading achievement test, the parents may believe their child is ready for 7th grade material. Actually, the score means that the child reads 4th grade material as well as the average 7th grader.

Who Are the Other Students Who Took the Test?

Stanines, percentiles, and grade-level equivalent scores all rely on measuring your students' scores against the scores of a large group of students who also took the same test. This other group of students, or the *comparison group*, may be composed of other students in your district who took the test at the same time or of students from a nationally representative sample who took the test earlier.

A student's test results are most meaningful for parents when you discuss them in relation to these other students' scores. When you compare one student with others who took the same test, you can discuss with the student's parents the ways in which their child is similar or dissimilar to other students in the group.

How Can You Help Parents To Interpret Their Child's Test Scores?

The most pressing question parents ask is, "What do the scores mean?" As their child's teacher, you are in a unique position to answer this question. Because you have seen their child's work every day, you should have a firm impression of their child's capabilities.

Before you talk with parents, compare each of your students' test scores with their daily classwork. Is there a large difference between the test results and your impression of how each student should have scored? If there is no difference, the test confirmed your impression of each child's skills.

If there is a large difference, however, look closely at the scores and the child's in-class performance. What do you think causes the difference? There is no easy way to determine the reason, but subskill scores can help you identify problem areas. Check to see if any one subskill score lowered the overall test score. For example, reading tests often have subskill scores in vocabulary and comprehension. Parents may believe that a child with an overall score in the 75th percentile has few reading difficulties. However, if the vocabulary subskill showed that the child was in the 65th percentile, he or she may need to improve vocabulary skills.

If the student's test results do not include an analysis of subskill scores, ask for it. Most test publishers will give you this information.

Remember that parents have a right and a need to know about their children's educational progress. Wherever possible, discuss past and current test scores together, as a way of helping them track their children's progress. Above all, remember that test results give you a powerful way of checking whether your students are working up to their potential.

Where to Find Other Information

Frechtling, Joy A., and Myerberg, N. James. *Reporting Test Scores to Different Audiences*. ERIC/TM Report 85 December, 1983.

Green, Donald Ross. "A Guide for Interpreting Standardized Test Scores," *NASSP Bulletin*. February, 1987, 71, 496, pp 23-35.

Hieronymus, A.N., and H.D. Hoover. *Manual for School Administrators. Levels 5-14*, ITBS Forms G/H Chicago, IL: The Riverside Publishing Company, 1986.

The Psychological Corporation. *On Telling Parents About Test Results, Test Service Notebook. 154*, San Antonio, TX: The Psychological Corporation, n.d.

References

Lyman, Howard, B. *Test Scores and What They Mean*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1986.

Merwin, Jack C. "Standardized Tests: One Tool for Decision Making in the Classroom," *Educational Measurement*. Spring, 1982, pp 14-16.

Rudman, Herbert C. "Classroom Instruction and Tests: What Do We Really Know About the Link? *NASSP Bulletin*, February, 1987, pp 3-21.

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
U.S. Department of Education

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education under contract No. RI-88-062003. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.

Permission is granted to copy and distribute this document.